



# Medical Services at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Games

*16 years later: A look back at Intermountain Healthcare's support during the 2002 Winter Olympics*

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, USA, February 23, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Winter Olympics holds a special place in Utah's heart. The 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympic Games was a magical time for the state and a healing one for the nation coming on the heels of 9/11, one of the nation's greatest tragedies. From the Olympic Cauldron Park at Rice-Eccles Stadium to the many Olympic venues still in operation today, you can see reminders of the historic time when Utah welcomed the world, offered a peaceful and safe gathering amidst turbulent times, and hosted the Winter Olympic Games.

As the medical services provider for the games, it was a historic time for Intermountain Healthcare, too. Intermountain helped staff 35 temporary medical clinics at 16 Olympic venues with doctors, nurses, physical therapists, and other caregivers. LDS, McKay-Dee, Cottonwood, Utah Valley, and Heber Valley hospitals were also designated "Olympic hospitals" in the event athletes, coaches, or spectators needed care for more serious conditions.

It took four years of planning and a Herculean effort to coordinate with state and federal agencies along with medical providers from other countries to provide the medical services for the games. We asked a few of our caregivers who helped support the games what they remembered most about their experience:

Lisa Gleed Thornton, RN, from Intermountain's Care Transformation Services, medical volunteer, Olympic Oval: "I remember how proud I was of Utah and the volunteer support we provided for the Olympic events. It was such an amazing experience to work with world-class athletes, experience Olympic events in person, and meet such wonderful people from all over the world. The medical team that supported the Olympic Oval was mostly staffed by ED clinicians from Cottonwood's ED. Since we were already a well-oiled machine in the ED, it was almost effortless for us to support this venue and athletes medically. Some of my best memories include meeting Eric Heiden, Derrick Parra, the amazing band that came with the Dutch team (I met them several times since we all supported pre-Olympic events as well), and athletes who were in such amazing condition. They were strong, fast, and disciplined — the ultimate athletes — and that was even more obvious when watching them in person. This commitment wasn't just for the Olympics — we supported speed skating events for about a year before the Olympics and for several months after. It was a priceless experience I will pass down through the generations in my family."

Shelly Bowen, RN, from Intermountain's Care Transformation Services, medical volunteer, Luge/Bobsleigh, Utah Olympic Park: "I remember the spectators were asked to park in the lower parking lot and walk up a fairly steep hill to the venue and because many weren't used to altitude. This was fairly difficult. We saw patients with chest pain and difficulty breathing as well as cold feet and hands. Everyone we interacted with was positive and grateful for the service. I loved seeing the young and the older coming to watch the events and enjoy their Olympic experience. We watched the event on a closed-circuit TV in the clinic, and it was really exciting to part of running the Olympics and knowing the event results right away."

Scott Hansen, MD, from the Salt Lake Intermountain LiVe Well Center, venue medical officer, Figure Skating/Short Track Speedskating, Salt Lake Ice Center: "My work was to oversee all medical operations at the Salt Lake Ice Center venue and provide support care to the athletes who didn't have team physicians. I also worked with U.S. Speedskating. I spent two weeks living near the Ice Center (in the Delta Center) to be available day and night. I was present for most competitions with figure skating and short track. These were high-energy events with lots of drama. The Olympic athletes were outstanding individuals with high dedication and sacrifice and great skills, and they supported each other — off the ice, they were all friends and showed great international cooperation. Olympic volunteers, especially our medical teams, showed great willingness to serve, to help, and to make the experience good for everyone. Each Olympic Games since brings back good memories and reminds me of the sense of community and giving to a higher cause that existed here in 2002."

Jess Gomez from Intermountain Medical Center, Intermountain Olympic Communications Committee: "Our team was stationed at the hospital around the clock in the event that an Olympic athlete was brought to the hospital due to an injury or illness. News media from around the world were here monitoring and reporting on any situation related to the Olympics, including medical care for the athletes. My first memory is of watching the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games at Rice-Eccles Stadium with our team from the helipad atop Intermountain LDS Hospital, located about a mile away. Eight stories high, sitting on plastic lawn chairs, we were close enough to see the bright, brilliant lights dancing out of the stadium and the amazing and intricate firework show that lasted for two hours. I vividly recall being so proud of being a Utahn — and being part of a community that came together to help the world heal just months after the tragedy of September 11."

"My second memorable moment was watching US Speedskating phenom Apolo Anton Ohno competing in a race in which he and several other skaters got tangled up as they jockeyed for position on a turn, which sent Ohno and two other skaters bouncing into a wall. We were watching the race on TV in our office and immediately looked at each other in disbelief as NBC replayed the violent accident, then reported on national television that Ohno was being transported to Intermountain LDS Hospital for medical care. Our tranquil evening ended right then. Within minutes, the phones in the office were ringing off the hook as news media from the world were calling to get information on the Olympic star. Those inquiries — more than 260 calls and hundreds of journalists on site — lasted for six hours as we worked with Ohno and US Speedskating to manage the media onslaught. Fortunately, Ohno only suffered minor injuries. It was a very long night, but an amazing experience I won't soon forget."

Rhett Farrer, PT, ATC, from Intermountain Dixie Regional Medical Center, medical volunteer, Olympic Oval: "I volunteered for several events that led up to the Olympics. It was fun to see a lot of the background work the public is never aware of for these events. There was an extensive background check and clearing process. I made multiple trips up to Salt Lake for meetings and instruction before I was given my assignment. I was assigned to long-track speedskating and I took as many shifts as they'd give me. I provided "field of play" coverage, so I actually got to be on the ice for practice sessions and the live races. It was so exciting and I hardly knew anything about the sport. I met Dr. Eric Heiden, who has five gold medals from the 1980 Olympics in speedskating. He gave me some quick education and a list of who was who, which was awesome. Conan O'Brien came and did a cameo skit. I got to do fake CPR on him, give him a sternal rub and pulled chest hair off him to get him to scream — and he DID scream. I'd do all of it again in a heartbeat. I really felt it was like a life event I didn't want to miss. I don't keep contact with any of the athletes, but I still cross paths with some of the other volunteers. I still have my entire medical attire, and I treasure it."

Intermountain spent 17 days serving 9,675 Olympic patients from 93 countries, but the memories are countless.

Intermountain CEO Marc Harrison, MD, adds: "Intermountain's eminent role in the 2002 winter games is remarkable. From what I understand, 13,000 of our caregivers stepped up to help during the games. That speaks volumes about our culture and our people, who were proud to represent Utah and Intermountain Healthcare.

"Utah saw a surge of nearly 70,000 visitors a day during the games, heightened security, and larger-than-expected volumes at venue clinics compared to previous Winter Olympics. But we were ready. Our caregivers did what they do best – provide extraordinary care with compassion for our community, which in this case was the entire world. If the bid for the 2030 games is successful, we'll be there again with our saline wash, gauze, and expertise ready to help every step of the way."

Daron Cowley  
Intermountain Healthcare  
801-442-2834  
email us here

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